

Burlington Free Press

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Vote down Air Guard item

February 28, 2006

Burlington voters should reject a ballot item that tries to alter the way the Vermont Air National Guard is deployed.

Voters should join the leading mayoral candidates, members of Burlington City Council, Mayor Peter Clavelle, a host of credible candidates for the new City Council and Vermont's entire congressional delegation in denouncing the measure. This unified resistance to the measure is shared by Democrats, Republicans, Progressives and Independents. They see it as an anti-Guard resolution rather than an anti-war statement.

The nonbinding advisory measure that was brought forward by the citizens group, Take Back the Air Guard, asks residents if the City Council should use "all lawful means" to keep the Vermont Air National Guard at home providing state and national defense -- and "to prevent their overseas deployment to drop bombs in wars of aggression against other nations."

The graphic wording might tug on anti-war sentiment, of which there is much in Burlington. But common sense should prevail.

The measure would have zero influence on the philosophy that sent this nation to war.

It would send a negative message to the men and women of the Guard.

It could create a scenario where the city would be forced to change its lease with the Guard, setting in motion a chain reaction to remove the base and 1,000 Guard members from Burlington International Airport.

Supporters of the ballot measure assure all who ask that their intention is not to create a situation where the Guard's presence could be placed at risk, but it is hard to imagine that a vote in favor of this ballot measure could have any other impact.

If voters want to jeopardize the Vermont Air Guard and jobs, approving this measure is one way to do it.

If voters want to end the war in Iraq, this measure won't do it.

Members of the City Council, who have vociferously opposed the war in Iraq, are standing united against the Air Guard ballot measure. Last week, the council voted unanimously to urge voters to turn down the item on Town Meeting Day. Senators Patrick Leahy and Jim Jeffords and Rep. Bernie Sanders have issued a statement of support for the Air Guard and its 1,000 members stationed at the Burlington Airport.

Your leaders across the political spectrum have spoken in a rare unified stance against ballot item No. 6.

Voters should do the same. Ballot item No. 6

Burlington voters will be asked this question on Town Meeting Day: "Shall the City Council be advised to use all lawful means to keep the men and women of the Vermont Air National Guard at

home to provide air defense for the state and nation, and to prevent their overseas deployment to drop bombs in wars of aggression against other nations?"